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Billy: This Trip Seems Over

Zbigniew Brzezinski was the last scheduled witness at the Senate's investigation of Billy Carter's Libyan connection last week, and the nine-member subcommittee believed it saw inconsistencies in the national-security adviser's written testimony. But when the hostile give-and-take was over, there was still no hard evidence that anyone at the White House had done anything illegal—or even seriously improper—to help the President's younger brother.

Brzezinski had become involved in Billy's Libyan dealings last November, when he asked the President's brother to arrange a meeting with Libyan envoy Ali Houderi as part of an effort to free the American

indicated that he had briefed the President.

It thus appeared that Brzezinski might have lied to protect the President from charges that he had used U.S. intelligence information on behalf of his brother. But Brzezinski was unfazed by the apparent discrepancy. April 1, he told the subcommittee, was a critical day in the Iran hostage negotiations; it was entirely possible, he said, that though he had made a note to himself to discuss Billy's affairs with the President that day, he had actually let the matter slide until April 2.

Not everyone on the committee believed Brzezinski's account—which made for some heated exchanges. "We're trying to get the truth," Sen. Strom Thurmond acidly told Brzezinski, "but we're not sure you're telling it." Retorted Brzezinski: "I know I'm telling the truth." Brzezinski also held his ground when Thurmond suggested that in warning Billy he had acted more like the President's "political troubleshooter" than his top national-security adviser. "I consider that to be a highly improper insinuation," Brzezinski bristled. And when Sen. Bob Dole asked if he would "normally" allow Billy and business associate Randy Coleman to sit in on his White House meeting with Houderi, Brzezinski shot back: "Normally we don't deal with American hostages held captive."

'Red Flag': The subcommittee was also stymied by White House appointments secretary Phillip J. Wise Jr. Wise testified that a telephone conversation he had with Billy on Dec. 6—the day the President himself met with Houderi—concerned nothing more than a hospital project in Warm Springs, Ga. And to the panel's mounting frustration, Wise insisted—no less than 24 times—that he could not recall any of the other conversations he was said to have

had with Billy or Randy Coleman on a number of other crucial dates. "A whole bunch of repeated 'I don't recall' are a red flag to those of us who are looking for the truth," warned subcommittee chairman Birch Bayh, to no avail.

With no witnesses to contradict either Brzezinski or Wise, the subcommittee now seems at a dead end. Staff counsel Philip Tone and his investigators are still pursuing leads—among them a telephone log that shows an intriguing number of calls between the phone Billy liked to use at the Best Western Motel in Americus, Ga., and both the White House and the Libyan Embassy in Washington. The calls were made on the day that President Carter met with Houderi and around the time Brzezinski found out about Billy's oil deal. In addition, former budget chief Bert Lance is due to

give a deposition to the subcommittee this week that may shed some light on Billy's financial problems. And Tone may question some more witnesses—among them, perhaps the President.

But the investigation is scheduled to end in two weeks, and subcommittee members say it is unlikely that they will come up with anything new. "What we're dealing with here is a series of perhaps wholly innocent blunders ... [that] add up to an appearance of incompetence" at the White House, says Sen. Charles McC. Mathias Jr., a Republican subcommittee member. But critics claim the subcommittee has run a shoddy investigation. Republican and Democratic members alike were in such a hurry to get public hearings under way that the staff had virtually no time to conduct a thorough investigation; some key witnesses were actually called to testify before chief counsel Tone had even been hired, and subcommittee members often seemed unprepared to ask sharp questions. Senator Mathias's judgment about White House incompetence might just as well apply to the Senate investigation.

ALLAN J. MAYER with KIM WILLENSON
in Washington



James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

Brzezinski testifying: A hostile give-and-take.

hostages in Iran. Several months later, Brzezinski telephoned Billy to inform him that the government had found out he had made a deal with an oil company to buy Libyan crude—and to warn him not to do anything that might embarrass the Administration. The main point at issue was Brzezinski's earlier claim—contained in a White House report—that he had told the President about Billy's oil deal only after he had warned Billy about embarrassing the Administration. According to the White House report, Brzezinski said he learned of the oil deal from CIA chief Adm. Stansfield Turner on March 31, called Billy immediately and told the President the next day. But subcommittee investigators determined that Billy didn't hear from Brzezinski until the evening of April 1, after the national-security adviser's own notes